

“Assisting Landmine Survivors - A Decade of Efforts”.

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome you at the NDA to the Symposium: “Assisting Landmine Survivors - A Decade of Efforts”.

The NDA is proud to have the opportunity to support the Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the occasion of the 10th Anniversary of the Vienna Meeting.

I think this symposium not only reflects 10 years of hard work but also offers a chance to discuss such important issues in a multi-national setting among experts and people directly affected by landmines. I am confident that you will make the findings and conclusions of this symposium known in your respective environments, thus fostering the national and international discourse concerning that important issue.

The MoD has participated in the Ottawa Process from the very beginning of this political initiative, in 1996, which aims at reaching a comprehensive ban on APM.

Our motives are obvious and clear:

The tendency of various conflict parties to use APM, without documentation and restriction, increasingly

worsened the situation for innocent civilians and caused the people in conflict regions tremendous harm and suffering, not only during but also long after the conflicts.

This inhuman practice did not only seriously hamper the social and economic recovery of those societies affected but also presented a risk for our own peacekeepers.

With our early active involvement in the initiative that resulted in an initial draft of the treaty we were able to substantially contribute to the final version of the Ottawa Convention in 1997.

By that time, our own Austrian legislation, prohibiting the production, transfer, and use of APM was already in force and all stocks of APM were destroyed.

Consequently, Austria had no problems ratifying and implementing the international Ottawa Treaty.

Yet, our engagement in the Ottawa Process did not stop with fulfilling this obligation. We continue to be actively involved in the annual information exchange and remain engaged in mine and unexploded ordnance clearing in Peacekeeping Operations.

We strongly support the objectives of the Ottawa Convention which will hopefully one day become a standard worldwide, to which all countries commit themselves.

I now ask for your understanding that I am taking this opportunity to make a few remarks about our NDA and the premises we are on. As you can see, we are in a just recently renovated building, the so-called Academy Wing. This late-Baroque SALA TERRENA, with the seven classical liberal arts depicted on the ceiling is the most impressive room in this wing and will be your working environment today. We are located in the VII District of Vienna and this compound has a very long history. Let me point out just some of the highlights.

In 1852 the Austrian Emperor FJ laid the foundation for the “War School” of the Monarchy, which was responsible for the education of General Staff Officers and for higher officer training. It was, so to speak, the predecessor of our Academy. From 1852 until now these buildings have accommodated training facilities.

In 1955, ten years after the end of WWII, Austria regained its independence and sovereignty and higher officer training could be resumed. In 1967, the former Staff Academy was turned into the NDA, as we know it today.

The main tasks of the NDA are:

- Education and training of Staff and General Staff Officers
- Training of military leaders and
- Teaching and research in security policy.

Our academy is the highest training and research institution of the AAF.

If you get a chance to take a look at the posters outside in the hallway you will get a more detailed picture of our Academy. I am, however, convinced that you will be very satisfied with this venue.

I would now like to wish you an interesting symposium and may it contribute to better understanding, awareness, and resource allocations, when dealing with this very important issue.